

## Thomas Jefferson to Meriwether Lewis, November 16, 1803, from Thomas Jefferson and Early Western Explorers, Transcribed and Edited by Gerard W. Gawalt, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

**Thomas Jefferson to Meriwether Lewis**

Washington Nov. 16. 1803

Dear Sir

I have not written to you since the 11th & 15th of July, since which yours of July 15, 22, 25, Sep. 8, 13, & Oct. 3. have been recieved. The present has been long delayed by an expectation daily of getting the inclosed 'account of Louisiana' through the press.\* The materials are received from different persons, of good authority. I inclose you also copies of the Treaties for Louisiana, the act for taking possession, a letter from Dr. Wistar, & some information collected by myself from Truteau's journal in MS. all of which may be useful to you. The act for taking possession passes with only some small verbal variations from that inclosed, of no consequence. Orders went from hence, signed by the King of Spain & the first Consul of France, so as to arrive at Natchez yesterday evening, and we expect the delivery of the province at New Orleans will take place about the close of the ensuing week, say about the 25th inst. Govr. Claiborne is appointed to execute the powers of Commandant & Intendant, until a regular government shall be organized here. at the moment of delivering over the posts in the vicinity of N. Orleans, orders will be dispatched from thence to those in Upper Louisiana to evacuate & deliver them immediately. You can judge better than I can when they may be expected to arrive at these posts, considering how much you have been detained by low waters, how late it will be before you can leave Cahokia, how little progress up the Missouri you can make before the freezing of the

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river; that your winter might be passed in gaining much, information by making Cahokia or Kaskaskia your head quarters, & going to St. Louis & the other Spanish posts that your stores &c. would thereby be spared for the winter, as your men would draw their military rations, all danger of Spanish opposition avoided. We are strongly of opinion here that you had better not enter the Missouri till the spring. But as you have a view of all circumstances on the spot, we do not pretend to enjoin it, but leave it to your own judgment in which we have entire confidence. One thing however we are decided in: that you must

not undertake the winter excursion which your propose in yours of Oct. 3. Such an excursion will be more dangerous than the main expedition up the Missouri, & would, by an accident to you, hazard our main object, which, since the acquisition of Louisiana, interests every body in the highest degree. The object of your mission is single, the direct water communication from sea to sea formed by the bed of the Missouri & perhaps the Oregon. By having Mr. Clarke with you we consider the expedition double manned, & therefore the less liable to failure, for which reason neither of you should be exposed to risques by going off of your line. I have proposed in conversation, & it seems generally to be assented to, that Congress shall appropriate 10. or 12,000 D. for exploring the principal waters of the Missisipi & Missouri. In that case I should send a party up the Red river to it's head, then to cross over to the head of the Arcansa, & come down that. A 2d party for the Pani & Padouca rivers, & a 3d perhaps for the Moingona & St. Peters. As the boundaries of interior Lousiana are the high lands inclosing all the waters which run into the Missisipi or Missouri directly or indirectly, with a greater breadth on the gulph of Mexico, it becomes interesting to fix with precision by celestial observations the longitude & latitude of the sources of these rivers, and furnishing points in the contour of our new limits. This will be attempted distinctly from your mission, which we consider as of major importance, & therefore not to be delayed or hazarded by any episodes whatever.

The votes of both houses on ratifying & carrying the treaties into execution have been precisely party votes, except that Genl Dayton has separated from his friends on these

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questions & voted for the treaties. I will direct the Aurora & National Intelligencer to be forwarded to you for 6 months at Cahokia or Kaskaskia, on the presumption you will be there. Your friends & acquaintances here & in Albemarle are all well as far as I have heard; and I recollect no other small news worth communicating present my friendly salutations to Mr. Clarke, & accept them affectionately yourself.

Th: Jefferson

[Enclosure]

Extracts from the Journal of M. Truteau, Agent for the Illinois trading company, residing at the village of Ricara, up the Missouri.

This company was confirmed in 1795, with the exclusive right for 10 years to trade with all the nations above the Poncas, as well to the South, and the West, as to the North of the Missouri with a premium of 3000 prs. for the discovery of the South Sea: and a gratification of 10,000 prs. which the King of Spain is to pay for the support of a milice. The company however have...In the Missouri river there is depth sufficient to carry a frigate as far up as it is known. It has no cataracts, no portages. The winds on it are so violent that the periogues are sometimes obliged to lie by one, two, three, or four days, and sometimes take as long time to descend as to ascend the river. The Canadians employed in the trading voyages on it have 250 " to 300" for 18 months and take it often in goods, on which the merchant gains half. The soil of the Missouri is the most fertile in the Universe. The rivers falling into it are all navigable more or less from 50 or 100 to 200 or 300 leagues.

The Ricaras, are a branch of the Panis, residing up the Missouri, about 430 leagues from the Illinois. There are 2 villages of them, half a league apart, the one 800 yds. from the river, the other 100 yards. They are a mild people, having about 300 warriors. There is no timber on the Missouri for 50 leagues above or below them.

The Crow nation inhabit near the Rocky mountain.

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The Sioux inhabit the Northern part of the Missisipi, and are hostile to the Ricaras, Mendanes, big-bellies and others. Others of them live on the river St. Pierre. They have from 30 to 1000 men, and abound in fire-arms. They are the greatest beaver hunters; and could furnish more beavers than all the nations besides, and could bring them to a depot on the Missouri rather than to St. Pierre, or any other place. Their beaver is worth the double of the Canadian for the fineness of it's fur and parchment;

The Chayennes, Panis Mahas, Mendannes, Big bellies are in the neighborhood of the Ricaras.

The Pados are 80 leagues from the Ricaras, South, on a branch of the river.

The Cayoguas, Caminaiches and Pitapahatos are to the South and S.W. of the Ricaras, on a branch of the Missouri. They have had no communication with the Whites. This river is wide but too shallow for a perioque.

The Grand Osages are from 7 to 800 men. They furnish 20,000 skins of the small deer, and take 14 to 15 M. pcs. de Mes. [qu. whether these character pcs de Mes. mean pieces de Marchandis or piastres de Mexique?

The Petits Osages are 250 to 300 men. Furnish 7 to 8000 fine deer skins and take 4 to 5 M. pcs. des Mes.

The Kansas, 250 to 300 men. Furnish and take the same as the Petits Osages.

With the three last nations the hunt continues to Oct. Nov. and even the middle of Dec. The hunters then meet, fix their prices, which are a blanket of 2½ points for 6, 7, or 8 deerskins. In 2 days the whole are sold, and, if the ice did not hinder, the traders could be returned by Christmas, whereas they do not return till April or May. These nations are very certain of the arrival of traders among them, but those above are often disappointed; because the merchants at St. Louis receive their goods from Mackinac, or Montreal, and

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they do not arrive at St. Louis early enough to reach the upper nations in time for the season. Through th Ohio the goods might be brought in time to reach the uppermost nations.

The Otocatas take 2 M to 2,500 pcs. marchse. and furnish 3500 to 4000 fine peltries of Deer, and ¼ of that of beaver.

The Mahas are from 4 to 500 men. The Poncas 200 to 250 men. These two nations furnish and take each about the same as the Otocatas, but more beaver. The English however drove them off by land to the river Moingona.

The Panis of the 2 villages are from 4 to 500 men. Take 2000 to 2500 pcs Marche. and furnish 4000 skins, robes and ...of the 1st quality. Those of the Republic (Loups) are from 400 to 500 men. Take and furnish about half as much as the last. They are 50 to 100 leagues apart.

The Loups, which are Panis also are from 200 to 250 men.

FC in the hand of Thomas Jefferson in Thomas Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress.

\*An Account of Louisiana, being an abstract of documents, in the offices of the Departments of State, and of the Treasury (Washington, 1803).